

Silent Soldier

The man behind the Afghan Jihad



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The man behind the Afghan jihad General Akhtar Abdur
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Introduction

HE WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE ONLY GENERAL TO TAKE ON THE SOVIET MILITARY MACHINE SINCE THE END OF WORLD WAR 2 - AND WIN. FOR THIS HE SHOULD BE SALUTED.

Up to the date of his tragic death on the 17th August, 1988, in the plane crash that also killed President Zia-ul-Haq, few people apart from his close family, knew General Akhtar as well as I. Certainly within Pakistan, his name was unknown to the public. Even within the military few appreciated his enormous contribution to the Afghan Jihad. This was partially due to the secretive nature of his job as Director-General of ISI from 1979-1987, and partially to his deliberate avoidance of publicity.

The ISI was, and still is probably the most powerful and influential organisation in the country. It has responsibility for military and political intelligence gathering, together with overall coordination of internal security. Its activities must remain covert, its operatives clandestine, and its methods unorthodox. Like any national intelligence body it is regarded by many with apprehension, if not fear. During President Zia's military regime this was particularly so. Within the military the ISI and its senior staff were regarded with deep suspicion. Senior officers believed, with some justification, that ISI was watching them, that President Zia used ISI to keep a check on his generals. In these circumstances to be the Director-General, with daily direct access to the president was to be in a position of great power. Such power bred envy, distrust, and perhaps hatred, among some. This was the post held by General Akhtar for eight years - far longer than any other Director-General before or since. Had he not died with the president, the likelihood is that General Akhtar would have been requested to assume control in Pakistan, at least for a time.

The reason for General Akhtar's long tenure of office was his successful direction of the war in Afghanistan. Within the ISI is a specially formed bureau, headed by a brigadier (myself for the period 1983-87), charged with the day to day coordination of the Afghan Jihad. This department controls the allocation of arms and ammunition; their distribution to Mujahideen leaders and commanders; the training of Mujahideen in Pakistan; the allocation of funds from the US and Saudi Arabian governments; and the strategic planning

of operations inside Afghanistan. It is the nearest that the Mujahideen came to having a general headquarters with overall logistic and operational responsibilities.

At least fifty percent of General Akhtar's time was spent on matters related to the war in Afghanistan. Under his leadership the Soviet superpower, although at the time I write this it has lost this status, was beaten on the battlefield. He achieved what most, including the Americans, initially considered impossible - the withdrawal of the foreign infidels from Afghanistan. His success ensured his continuance in office. President Zia could not afford to lose him during those critical years, when the Mujahideen had to fight armour and aircraft with rifles and mortars. When General Akhtar finally left ISI on promotion to four star general in March 1987, military victory in Afghanistan was in sight. The Mujahideen had at long last got an effective anti-aircraft weapon in the US Stinger missile, and the Soviets were talking in terms of withdrawal. If any one person could be singled out as the architect of this forthcoming victory it was General Akhtar.

Today the position is so very different. The victory that was anticipated by all in early 1989, when the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan, has not materialised, Najibullah and his gang remain in Kabul, the Soviets continue to pour in vast quantities of ammunitions and quipment, while the Mujahideen leadership fight political battles in Peshawar, rather than military ones around Kabul. Defeat appears to have been snatched from the jaws of victory.

I believe that there was a deliberate decision, taken by the US, that the Mujahideen should not be allowed an outright military victory, that they should not be permitted to march into Kabul. Once the Soviets were seen to be willing to withdraw the Americans resolved to keep the Islamic fundamentalists from taking over in Kabul. It suited both superpowers to have a stalemate on the battlefield. This covert switch of objectives was marked by the removal of General Akhtar, by promotion, from ISI. From then on the strength of the Jihad was on the wane; from then on it become more and more obvious to myself, and others, that our American allies had an objective that fell far short of a victory in the field.

I have great admiration for what General Akhtar achieved from the Jihad. Had he remained in ISI I feel certain that the Afghan war would have been won within months of the Soviet's retreat. Like so many soldiers before him he was sacrificed by politicians for political expediency, only in his case it was political pressure from outside Pakistan that removed him, just at the moment when the Mujahideen were poised to capture the fruits of victory.

Because I knew him so well, because I greatly admired his strength of character, and because I feel strongly that his contribution to the Jihad in Afghanistan should not be forgotten, I have written this short book. In it I attempt to highlight General Akhtar's role in the war, his character, and his professionalism as a soldier. Like us all he had his faults, there were times when he and I disagreed on strategy and tactics, but he will go down in history as the only general to take on the Soviet military machine since the end of World War 2 - and win. For this he should be saluted.

Having said all this, let me make it clear to the reader that while this book is primarily written to make public the contribution of General Akhtar to the Afghan Jihad, nothing could have been achieved without the endeavours of the Mujahideen, their commanders, and their political leaders. A guerrilla war is very much a war of junior leaders and individual soldiers. Afghanistan is no exception, the success of a rocket team, a machine gunner, or the firer of a Stinger anti-aircraft missile, can bring results out of all proportion to the size of the group. To the unfamiliar observer these tiny triumphs may appear insignificant, but multiply them a hundredfold, perhaps a thousandfold, and they become war winning events.

Year after year the Mujahideen have overcome immense difficulties and privations, the destruction of their homes, and total disruption or death of their families, in order to continue the fight against the infidel. It has been, and still is, a war of raids, ambushes, assassinations, and rocket attacks, undertaken against a modern army well equipped with armour and aircraft. These guerrilla tactics succeeded in wounding the Soviet Bear sufficiently to bring about a retreat from Afghanistan. Once again the Afghan Mujahideen have proven themselves to be unbeatable on the battlefield of their choice - in the dusty deserts and jagged mountains of their homeland.

General Akhtar was always the first to accept that this victory belonged to the Mujahideen and their families, who so often were called upon to make the supreme sacrifice in the struggle for the freedom of their country.

The Man

HE WAS, FOR YEAR, AT THE TOP OF THE KGB'S HIT LISTS, WITH A HUGE PRICE ON HIS HEAD, BUT DANGER OR UNPOPULARITY NEVER CONCERNED HIM. HE WAS ACCUSTOMED TO BOTH.

In September, 1983, I was a brigade commander attending a divisional exercise at Quetta when I received a telephone call that was to send me on a new posting to ISI. I was told I must fly to Islamabad immediately to report to the Director-General. To say I was apprehensive would be an understatement. I was filled with misgivings. I knew the reputation of ISI, I knew that all who worked within it were regarded with intense suspicion by their seniors as well as their peers, I knew that I had no previous intelligence training and, above all, I knew the reputation of the Director-General, General Akhtar to be that of a dedicated and demanding taskmaster. I had served under him previously when I commanded a battalion in his division. Now he was a lieutenant-general in charge of the country's most powerful military organisation. Of the thirty or so brigadiers whose postings had been announced at that time I was the only one going to ISI. Within 72 hours I reported to my new boss.

On meeting General Akhtar one could not fail to be struck by his appearance. He looked a soldier. His physique was stocky and tough, his uniform immaculate, with three rows of medal ribbons denoting service in every campaign in which Pakistan has fought since partition from India in 1947. He had a pale skin, which he proudly attributed to his afghan ancestry, and he carried his years well. He was one of the most handsome generals of our country. He was 63 when he was murdered, but he looked a good ten years younger. He was almost never ill, though his only formal exercise was jogging. He attributed his good health and physical condition to his total abstention from drinking and smoking, moderate eating habits and afternoon naps.

By some he has been called the Silent Soldier. It is certainly true that he seldom revealed his inner thoughts to his subordinates. He was by nature secretive which, because of his responsibility for ISI and national security, became the predominant characteristic of

Akhtar, the man. When he saw me that first day in his office he knew full well that I did not want the job. He started by asking me if I knew anything about ISI's role in Afghan war. I admitted I knew very little apart from rumours, whereupon he explained at considerable length the sort of work I would be doing. He emphasized that it would be an operational rather than an intelligence role that I would play. This allayed some of my fears, as I genuinely felt that I was completely unqualified for intelligence duties. He told me that he had selected me personally, and that my name had been endorsed by the president. By the time he had finished I was extremely excited by the task before me, and while I still had doubts, General Akhtar had persuaded me that the opportunity to play a major part in the Afghan Jihad was likely to be highlight of my career. From an unwilling, ignorant, and somewhat resentful recruit of ISI, Akhtar had quietly and convincingly converted me into a loyal and determined subordinate.

Perhaps he was deliberately being kind to me on that occasion, as he was normally a somewhat cold and reserved person outside of his close family. I would now say he was one of the most inscrutable generals in the Pakistan Army. He hated to be photographed, he had no real intimates, and nobody in whom to confide. Only rarely did I see him reveal his feelings in the three years I served under him. Always outwardly calm and severe he had no time for incompetents. He was a tough cold and hard general who was sure he knew wrong from right. If an officer did not meet his exacting standards he was out. In fact many of his subordinates disliked him as a martinet. They found him difficult to serve as sometimes he could be a bully. Nevertheless, I found that provided I did my job to the best of my ability, and stood up to him on important matters with a well reasoned argument, he would listen. During his time at ISI he made many enemies, both inside and outside the military. He was, for years, at the top KGB's hit lists, with a huge price on his head, but danger or unpopularity never concerned him. He was accustomed to both.

General Akhtar was from the East Punjab. Born in Peshawar on the 11th June, 1924, he was the son of Dr. Abdul Rahman Khan, who spent 30 years as a doctor in the NWFP government service. Unfortunately his father died when Akhtar was only four, so his mother took the family back to their native village in the Jullundar area of East Punjab. From then on his upbringing was humble, and in many ways hard. His formal education was at college in Amritsar, and then at the Government College in Lahore where he

obtained a masters degree in economics in 1945. It was while at university that Akhtar's sporting skills were developed. He became a champion boxer, wrestler, and cyclist, acquiring a reputation for physical strength that was to stay with him throughout his life.

Akhtar joined the Indian Army, as an officer cadet in 1945 and was commissioned in early 1947. Little dreaming that one day he would command a successful guerrilla war against the Russian superpower and as a result would die in an act of sabotage. When Zia and Akhtar were killed the last two Pakistani Army officers who had been commissioned in India, had gone. Akhtar was a very junior artillery officer at the time of the partition of India and the birth of Pakistan. It was the time of the appalling horrors of mass murder and massacre associated with the dismantling of British India. What he witnessed was never forgotten and never forgiven. The slaughter of Muslims by Hindus and Sikhs sickened him. One one occasion, when he was employed on escort duty on a refugee train Hindu troops seized him and tied his hands. For a while it seemed that he would be executed, but the timely arrival of some Muslims saved him. For the rest of his life he regarded India as an implacable enemy, both of his country and his religion.

He fought against India three times before he faced the Soviets in Afghanistan. In 1948 he participated in the Kashmir war of independence which gave him the opportunity to operate with tribal Lashkars. He would often in later years, recall these experiences with pride and pleasure. With them he gained, at an early age, an understanding of the tribal psyche, idiosyncrasies, and methods of fighting, that eventually helped him plan and direct the Afghan war over thirty years later.

Akhtar attended the Pakistan Military Staff College at Quetta in 1957, and was an instructor and company commander at the Pakistan Military Academy, Kakul, from 1961 to 1964. Both these positions indicated that the authorities thought highly of Akhtar's abilities. The staff college was, and is, designed to train selected students for high rank. It is the school for potential senior officers, while only the best are selected to train Pakistan's officer cadets at the Military Academy.

In 1965 Pakistan and India went to war. Major Akhtar was the second-in-command of an artillery regiment deployed on the Burki front. He participated in the defence of Lahore, and helped drive back the massive Indian attack on that city on 6th September. His regiment was one of the first units to open fire on the advancing Indians, delaying them sufficiently to allow the Pakistani infantry to deploy for the defence of Lahore. His courage and skill was rewarded with promotion to lieutenant colonel and the task of raising a new artillery regiment at Nowshera. He had to raise the new unit in the minimum time and rush it to the Rajistan front. Once again his guns went straight into action in the early hours of the morning. That such a new unit performed so effectively in battle for the first time was a reflection of the sterling qualities of leadership and training of the commanding officer.

After this war Colonel Akhtar was chosen to attend the Joint Services Staff College in England for a year. This was another indication that he was earmarked for higher things, although he detested paper work. His preference was for delegation or conferences where he could hear the views of his subordinates, make a decision, issue instructions, and then let his staff handle the paper.

Then, in 1971, came third clash with India. By this time Akhtar was commanding an artillery brigade. His regiments were among those Pakistani units that played a significant role in the military successes in the Kasur sector.

As a brigadier he attended the National Defence College in 1973, before being posted as an infantry brigade commander in Azad-Kashmir. Here he once again impressed his command with his untiring energy and professionalism. As a former artillery commanding officer who knew him well in those days said;

'During his tenure he actually scaled on foot the whole length and breadth of his area of responsibility. There was not a bunker, not a post, nor a weapon trench he did not visit. He personally tested most of the weapons and improved the defensive posture of his units... One evening we were out together in a forward locality, and from a vantage point we could clearly see a big town in Indian held Kashmir. He stood there and stared at the town for a

long time. The lights in the houses were coming on one by one. He ground his teeth and said, "If only once I get the orders you will see what I do". He walked around like a gaged lion ... his eyes reflected the intense feeling he felt for the pain and suffering of his fellow Muslims over there'.

At 50 he was given command of an infantry division, and he remained with it in Azad Kashmir for four years from 1974 to 1978. His climb up the promotion ladder had been slower than might have been expected from his bright start and earlier successes. In fact he was passed over the promotion in every rank from brigadier onwards, and yet eventually rose to full general. This was partly due to his introspective nature, and refusal to cultivate 'political' favours or seek out influential friendships. He did his job and did it well, but often more than this was needed to ensure accelerated advancement. His final appointment before going to ISI was as Adjutant General of the Army.

Akhtar was a difficult man to get to know well. He had a complex character with many facets. In his relations with his superiors he was a model of obedience and loyalty, but his handling of subordinates could at times be rough. Nevertheless, he always gained their respect. He worked himself remorselessly and expected the same from others.

I recall that at times he could be quite devious in his dealings with others if he felt it necessary for the good of the Jihad. The first time this occurred at a conference I was unaware of his tactics, and was acutely embarrassed. At the meeting an ISI analyst was describing the increased activities of the Mujahideen around Kabul. He measured it as a great success. General Akhtar interrupted to disagree. The argument became quite heated, with the analyst producing more and more evidence and statistics to prove his point.

Finally, the general said, 'I do not believe the reports of the embassies of the US, UK, or Pakistan on the Kabul situation. They are inflated and exaggerated. Use your head and professional judgement'. Then turning to me he said, 'You can ask him, he had not even issued the number of rockets that you claim have been fired on Kabul'. Not realising what his game was I fell into the trap, and replied, 'They are correct, Sir. We have issued much

more. In fact they have not included some engagements'. Before I could say more the general interrupted angrily: 'You have no idea as to what you have issued. Don't talk out of the back of your head'. My face turned red with anger and embarrassment, as he had seemingly deliberately insulted me in front of the others.

Afterwards he hastened to explain that I should not be upset by his remarks. He had intentionally argued with the analyst as he did not want a rosy picture presented of the Kabul situation. The general explained that, ' When I asked your views, I thought you would look towards me, so I could give you a signal [a wink]. Remember, in future, if I ask your views in open conference, never give the correct position as I am always as equally well informed as you'.

General Akhtar went on to tell me this was how he had to behave with the president during open conferences. Before such meetings he always carefully briefed Zia on the true situation, and gave him his own honest, frank, opinions. If, during the meeting, the president asked for his views he would always respond with what Zia wanted him to say. In public it was of great importance that disagreements on matters of substance should not be aired. Even as a normally straightforward professional soldier, Akhtar had to resort at times to intrigue for the good of the war effort.

In June, 1979, after only a year as Adjutant-General, Akhtar was posted as Director-General of ISI. He was picked for the job by President Zia. It was to be the summit of his military career. Although he was a lieutenant general leading the Afghan Jihad that Akhtar made his name. He could not know when he assumed his new duties that within six months he would be fighting the Soviet superpower, or that he would stay at ISI for eight years, coordinating and planning a guerrilla war that would eventually bring about the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. His contribution to the Jihad was decisive. Before he left on promotion in early 1987, he saw the signs of victory on the battlefield. Before he was murdered, along with his president, he saw the Soviets in retreat. Had he lived he would have seen all the years of struggle, all the lives lost, all the sacrifices of the Afghan people, thrown away, and the victory that had seemed so certain slip from the Mujahideen's grasp. At least he was spared all that.

The Beginnings

AT THE OUTSET AKHTAR WAS VIRTUALLY ALONE IN THINKING HE COULD DRIVE THE SOVIETS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN.

General Akhtar was the architect of the Afghan Jihad. It was he who advocated Pakistani participation, it was he who devised the overall military strategy, and it was he who supervised its implementation so skilfully that the Mujahideen defeated a superpower.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in late December, 1979, President Zia immediately sent for his Director-General of ISI. He wanted answers to many questions, he wanted to know how he (Pakistan) should react. Zia was a military man, and valued the advice of his generals. On this occasion he turned to Akhtar, the military chief of his national intelligence organization, for opinions and assessment.

The President realized that Pakistan faced a highly dangerous situation. To the east were 800 million hostile Hindus, while now, to the west, the Red Army had occupied Mghamstan, so the likelihood of Pakistan being squeezed out of existence between the two enemies was a real possibility. Not only that, but Zia's personal following inside Pakistan was, in some respects, shaky. His authority was based not on popular votes, but on the military, who governed with the use of military laws and decrees. Zia was the Chief Martial Law Administrator Internationally he had recently provoked worldwide consternation and condemnation by executing the former premier, minister, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. He felt isolated and threatened. In these circumstances the situation in Afghanistan took on added importance, how Pakistan reacted would be critical, not just for the country, but also for its president. Zia required from General Akhtar an 'appreciation of the situation' on a national scale, and he needed it quick.

Such an appreciation is a military planning paper, a logical, step by step examination of a given situation, where all relevant factors are considered, along with likely enemy objectives

or reactions, to produce a recommended course of action, and an outline plan to achieve it. General Akhtar prepared a detailed presentation on the situation as he saw it.

Akhtar and his staff had studied all aspects of the situation. In addition to examining the military geography of Afghanistan, its communications, and the layout of the border area (Durand Line), they evaluated the Afghan people. Akhtar was convinced that their warrior background, their historical tradition of prickly independence, their fortitude and stamina, coupled with the compelling moral force of a Jihad, would combine to produce an unbeatable guerrilla army if properly directed and trained. The 'appreciation' also covered politico- strategic matters, such as Soviet global commitments, the prevailing Iran situation, the US interests in the region, and India's likely reaction. His recommendation was that Pakistan should support the Jihad. He argued that not only was Afghanistan Pakistan's front line, but that with the Communists in control there the odds for further territorial expansion into Pakistan through Baluchistan were dramatically increased. Further, and of equal, if not greater significance, Islam was under attack. Akhtar considered that if Zia was to covertly support the Afghan resistance in a massive guerrilla war the Soviets could be halted, even rolled back. He believed that Afghanistan could be made into another Vietnam, with the Soviets in the shoes of the Americans. He urged Zia to take the military option. It would mean Pakistan secretly supporting the guerrillas with money, arms, ammunition, training, and operational advice. Most importantly it would entail offering the border areas of the NWFP and Baluchistan as a sanctuary for both refugees and guerrillas. Akhtar was well aware that for such a campaign to succeed a safe haven, a secure base, from which men and munitions could be channeled into Afghanistan was of paramount importance.

General Akhtar had recognized the potential of the situation, and from the beginning he had the courage to advocate taking on the world's second most powerful superpower on the battlefield. President Zia agreed with him. It would be a Jihad against Communist infidels; it would be Pakistan's first line of defense in the west; and it would regain for him some of his lost international esteem. That religious, strategic, and political factors all seemed to point in the same direction was indeed an encouraging circumstance. Akhtar's conviction that, provided the Soviets were not goaded into outright invasion, it was a sound military proposition clinched the matter. Pakistan would back the Jihad - covertly.

The president's instruction to Akhtar was that he should give him two years in which to consolidate his position in Pakistan, and internationally. To be more precise he told Akhtar that, 'The water in Afghanistan must boil at the right temperature'. For eight years Akhtar skillfully followed his orders. Although at times the temperature rose sharply and threatened to boil, such as when we conducted operations inside the Soviet Union, it never actually spilled over. Throughout the campaign it required considerable skill on Akhtar's part to so apply military pressure that it did not provoke a direct and open conflict between the USSR and Pakistan. In the event his judgment was proved sound, and although the Soviets shelled, bombed, and carried out sabotage in the border areas of Pakistan there was never any ground incursion.

At the outset Akhtar was virtually alone in thinking he could drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Before I joined IS! and the Jihad I too was skeptical of the ability of an army of ragtag guerrillas to defeat a modern conventional force with all its armour and aircraft. Certainly the US were far from enthusiastic at the beginning. They adopted a wait and see attitude. President Carter was locked into the intractable Tehran hostage crisis, which soured American opinion against all things Islamic, while advice from the Pentagon and CIA was that, with or without Pakistan's backing, Afghanistan was a lost cause. They believed the Soviet Army would be in full control in Afghanistan in a matter of weeks. It was a country within the Soviet's sphere of influence, so why throw good money after bad and antagonise the Soviets by supporting the Mujahideen.

The Strategy

THE OVERALL MILITARY STRATEGY DESIGNED TO DRIVE THE SOVIETS OUT WAS THE CLASSIC GUERRILA ONE OF DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS.

The mastermind behind the military strategy of the Afghan Jihad from the start was General Akhtar. As time went on he was usually content to allow his subordinates, such as myself, to solve the day to day tactical, training, or logistic problems, but he retained a firm grip on strategical matters, or the Mujahideen's political affairs. At the outset this had not been possible. Akhtar had to devote his energies to tackling a host of difficulties to gear up ISI to support a large scale guerrilla war from nothing. For the first six months, until the US, China, Saudi Arabia and others came in with cash or weapons, Pakistan was on its own. Akhtar had to create within ISI an organisation capable of handling the supply, training, and operations of tens of thousands of Mujahideen who were at that stage completely disorganised, ill-equipped, ill-trained, and lacked any form of coordinated strategic direction.

The first requirement was weapons. Akhtar scoured various ordnance depots of the Pakistan Army seeking discarded .303 rifles, ammunition, old British anti-tank mines, and some Chinese manufactured shoulder-fired rocket launchers. Next, lines of communication, a 'pipeline', had to be established to get the supplies to those who needed to use the items in Afghanistan. The Afghan Bureau within ISI at first used to transport the arms forward by night, even closing down completely during daytime in the early days. Gradually more and more individual Mujahideen commanders and parties found their way onto the supply list, and the system got off the ground in a makeshift fashion. Such was the start of a 'pipeline' that was eventually to expand to a capacity of 1000 tons a week by 1986.

The overall military strategy designed to drive the Soviets out was the classic guerrilla one of death by a thousand cuts. General Akhtar never once sought to confront the enemy in a large scale conventional battle. He appreciated that ambushes, assassinations, attack on supply convoys, bridges, pipelines, and airfields, with the avoidance of setpiece battles was the way to win the war. At the start emphasis was placed on the need to strengthen the

Mujahideen along with Durand Line (Pak-Afghan border). This was partly a necessity for the Mujahideen for the easy distribution of supplies, and partly for the security of the Pakistan frontier region, which was slowly built up into the guerrilla's main base of supply area. As the war progressed, and the logistic flow increased, so activities deeper inside Afghanistan were stepped p until active operations were being conducted in all 29 provinces.

For General Akhtar the key to victory was Kabul. His favourite expression when addressing the Mujahideen leaders was, 'Kaubul must burn'. His great ambition, which tragically he was unable to fulfil, was that after the Soviet defeat he would be able to visit Kabul and offer prayer to Allah for freeing the city from His enemies. Akhtar appreciated Kabul's significance to Afghanistan and to the Jihad. Kabul, as the capital, is the hub of political, educational, economic, diplomatic, and military activity. Within its confines are the government ministries, the university and technical colleges, foreign embassies, and the headquarters of the Afghan Army. From Radio Kabul, and the television studios, the ruling regime can manipulate the news, disseminate propaganda, and issue its decrees.

All roads in Afghanistan eventually lead to Kabul. It sits at the centre of a wheel, whose spokes are the roads and valley fanning out in all directions. To the north the Salang highway takes traffic to the Amu river, and the Panjsher valley penetrates the Hindu Kush. In the east Route I, carries the traveller alongside the Kabul river, through Jalaabad, and over the Khyber Pass to Peshawar. Several lesser roads to the south-east reach the passes over the mountains into the Parachinar peninsular, and via Gardez and Khost, to Miran Shah in Pakistan. The long 'ring road', built by the Americans, leads south to Gazni, Kandahar, and, eventually, to Herat some 600 kilometres west of Kabul. Even to the immediate west of the city numerous lesser trails and valleys wriggle their way into the mass of mountains that form the Hazarajat. Akhtar knew that as long as a communist government controlled Kabul it controlled the nerve centre of the country. To win the war he understood that not oly must the Soviets withdraws, but their Afghan puppets must be ejected from Kabul. This was always his primary military objective. Only if Kabul fell would the Jihad have succeeded, and Akhtar would never let us forget this. It was his obsession.

With this in mind Akhtar would always insist that Muhahideen commanders who were operating around Kabul got priority with regard to both training and heavy weapons. In practice this latter meant 107mm rocket launchers, first the Chinese multi (12)-barrel variety, and later the single barrel type which was our improvisation, manufactured by the Chinese, to reduce the weight. Our tactics were to train as many commanders as possible in stand-off rocket attacks, brief them as to the targets in the city, supply the weapons, and give them their missions. The aim was to keep up the pressure on Kabul throughout the year. The airfield, roads leading into the city, particularly the Salang highway which was the Soviets lifeline to the Amu, were subjected to frequent ambushing. Inside the city military and communist government targets were selected for rocket attacks, while acts of sabotage or assassination were undertaken against installations and individuals. Kabul was at the centre of Akhtar's strategy, but he also kept a close eye on the tactics we used to implement it.

Under Akhtar's leadership the support for the Jihad was gradually increased so that by the mid-1980's tens of thousands of tons of arms and ammunition were moved by ISI to the Mujahideen via their party warehouses. Similarly tens of thousands of guerrillas, with their commanders, came to Pakistan for training. From 1980 until 1987, Pakistan Army teams from ISI went into Afghanistan to advise and assist the Mujahideen on operations. With the consent of the president Akhtar initiated this highly covert and highly important assistance, although the detailed planning was left to the brigadier in charge of the Afghan Bureau.

When I took over the Bureau in late 1983 I felt somewhat overawed by the size of the task and the reputation of General Akhtar. I had my doubts as to whether I would meet his high standards. The first six months were extremely difficult as I knew the general was watching me closely. On one occasion Akhtar rang me up only five minutes after office hours had stated and demanded the stock position of SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles. Fortunately, it was my habit to insist on stock figures being on my desk first thing every day, so I was able to tell him at once. Then he asked me whether I was in the office or at home (for security reasons all calls of Akhtar were put through his operators so I could have been at either). On my confirmation that I was in my office Akhtar said, 'I do not expect you to remember the exact figures. Please re-check. I want the exact figures in five minutes', and hung up. I called

for the ledger to re-check and telephoned Akhtar to give him precisely the same figures. He was very sceptical until I explained my system. Akhtar certainly kept everybody on their toes. Often he would fire off unexpected questions at his staff to test them. Woebegone the officer who responded with the words 'I think'. Whenever I was out of Islamabad, which was frequently, my staff would be on tenderhooks. Invariably he would ask my deputy responsible for logistics about an operational matter, and vice versa. Sometimes this caught them out as they could not answer his queries. They would receive a verbal blasting for their ignorance. On my return I too would be told off for my officers 'inefficiency'.

One thing he could not abide was any attempt to bluff him. To be caught out bluffing the Director-General was infinitely worse than to be found ignorant. Bluffing smacked of dishonesty, and this he could not tolerate. A small personal incident will illustrate this point. He rang me up once to inquire the whereabouts of one of the Mujahideen party leaders. I replied immediately that, 'He is in Islamabad'. Probably he thought I was bluffing because, his next question was 'Can I see him in an hour?'. 'Yes Sir, he was in his house a few minutes ago when I spoke to him on the telephone, but I will check and confirm with you'. Within two minutes I had confirmed his availability, but Akhtar declined to see him on the pretext that something important had come up. I do not wish to create the impression that General Akhtar was always hard or unfeeling. Certainly as a highly professional soldier he would not tolerate lazy, dishonest, or inefficient subordinates, but he could be kind and humane as well. On one occasion the child of one of my staff officers had to undergo a series of operations spread over several years so he requested that his posting to ISI be extended, or he receive another job in Rawalpindi, on compassionate grounds. Not only did the general get his tenure extended, but he spoke personally to the medical authorities to find out if the child would need specialist treatment overseas.

Akhtar and The Mujahideen

WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF GENERAL AKHTAR'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUCCESS OF THE JEHAD WAS IN THE FIELD OF MUJAHIDEEN UNITY

Without doubt one of General Akhtar's greatest contributions to the success of the Jihad was in the field of Mujahideen unity. The Afghan is a fractious individual, with inborn tribal loyalties and jealousies. He is bound by his code of conduct, which demands both vengeance and hospitality. He is by nature and upbringing fiercely independent, and deeply suspicious of others not of his clan or tribe. Afghans living within a few kilometres of each other in adjacent valleys are often bitter enemies, locked into a blood feud that has perhaps continued for generations. While they are hardy and courageous fighters with an affinity for weapons, the greatest difficulty is in getting them to cooperate. Today, infighting and political feuding are out of control, with the result that the Jihad has collapsed. Even without the Soviets the likelihood of a military victory has receded to the extent of virtual invisibility. But it was not always so.

Akhtar appreciated that to win a guerrilla war on such a scale, over such a huge area, operations must be coordinated, they must be selective, and they must be carried out in the spirit of cooperation. Joining operations between rival groupings or parties must be achieved. His major achievement in the field was to get the Seven Party Alliance established by President Zia in 1984. Even Zia had to threaten to get the Mujahideen's political leaders to join the Alliance, but join they did, and Akhtar made it a fundamental part of his strategy for the prosecution of the war. He attached top priority to working with, and through, the Alliance. He personally attended conferences with them, he got to know the individual leaders, not as a commanding general, but as an equal. Over the months and years they grew to trust and respect him. While many still showed a reluctance to discuss their problems or grievances with each other, they all felt they could turn to Akhtar. They knew his judgement was sound, they knew he stood by his principles, they knew his faith in Islam was as strong as theirs, and they knew that his sole ambition was a victorious Jihad.

It was through the alliance political parties that Akhtar controlled the campaign effort. All Mujahideen commanders in the field were required to join a party. As it was only through the parties that arms were distributed, failure to join meant no weapons, which in turn led to loss of a following, prestige, and face. All very serious matters to an Afghan. We allocated arms to the parties on a basis of operational effectiveness, but as our critics claimed (including the US and CIA) on the basis of Islamic fundamentalism. Akhtar laid down a clear policy, which was followed. A party got weapons allocated not on the basis of size or religious fervour but purely on operational efficiency. Did the party have an efficient internal distribution system? Did its commanders cooperate with others in the field, or were there too many instances of feuding? Did their commander operate against critical strategic targets, or were they confined to areas of little importance or activity? And, above all, were their operations successful; did they kill the enemy or destroy his vehicles, aircraft or infrastructure? These were the sort of questions Akhtar and his ISI staff asked.

Akhtar's standing instruction to me was that I must arrange a meeting with one of the party leaders with him every week, and a conference with all seven at least monthly. Regrettably, due to other pressures this schedule was not always maintained. However, whenever he had a moment to spare he devoted it to enhancing unity for the Jihad. He rightly regarded it as a war winning factor, of far greater importance than a tactical victory on the battlefield. He referred to unity among the political leaders as 'strategic unity'. He saw strategic unity as his responsibility, while tactical unity was mine.

With individual leaders he would mostly discuss the military situation in Afghanistan, and their logistic difficulties. He would listen attentively to their views, which frequently involved complaints against the Pakistani police, provincial government, or the Afghan Refugee Commissionerate. He would always advise on cooperation, stressing the importance of Kabul. Meetings were always conducted in a friendly, informal manner, with the general giving the leaders their due respect. Nevertheless, he could be firm with them if necessary. While he never interfered with their internal party affairs, he vented his displeasure at corruption, the sale of arms, feuding, or inefficiency which affected the Jihad.

He had a happy knack with the leaders. He enjoyed their confidence and was, more than anybody else, responsible for keeping them together as a team for all those years. Sometimes I found leaders bitter and angry with him over a particular issue before a meeting, but afterwards they had lost their annoyance and seemed fully satisfied. Akhtar enjoyed meeting these men as he was fond of them, and appreciated their opinions.

Although he never revealed his personal likes or preferences to the leaders, he could not hide his feelings from me. There is no doubt he had a special liking for Sayaf, Khalis, Gul Badin, and Pir Effendi. Invariably he exchanged jokes with Khalis who has a good sense of humour.

One of the more sensitive problems that was often raised by the leaders to the general concerned the conditions and corruption in the refugee camps. Akhtar was their forthright spokesman in confronting both the civil and military authorities on these matters, but although he brought the complaints and grievances directly to the president it was very seldom that action was taken against the culprits. I recall protesting vehemently to him about the racketeering within the Afghan Refugee Commissionerate, and how it was adversely affecting the moral of the Mujahideen. Withholding registration documents, which entitled the refugee family to rations, unless bribed; not issuing certain foodstuffs, but keeping them for personal sale on the black-market, were but two of the common corrupt practices that were prevalent. I felt that the general was not keeping the president informed, and insisting on a proper clean up of these camps' administration. To this Akhtar replied, with deep emotion, 'Believe it I have never spared anyone about whom I had good evidence. But it is the prerogative of the president to take disciplinary action. I am simply helpless'.

Then he narrated to me a particular incident involving himself:

'I was offered over two million rupees as my commission of all the vehicles we have just purchased [for ISI use in moving supplies], and the gentleman who made the offer confided to me that every head of department, civil or military, gets this commission, as his right from him'.

Akhtar had refused, telling to give extra vehicles for the Jihad instead of his commission.

The problem was that Akhtar was too honest to beat the system. President Zia seemed to accept corruption as a way of life in Pakistan, and would not sack individuals for this offence. Akhtar always reported what was going on, never overlooking anybody including his own staff, but Zia never reacted. The only sure way of his removing senior generals or civil servants was if he perceived they were a threat to his position or reputation.

One thing is certain, Akhtar never courted favours or popularity. He knew full well that as Director-General of ISI he was a hated man. That most of his peers and seniors within the military regarded him with envy or fear. The cause of the Jihad had to be fought within Pakistan as well as inside Afghanistan. At times the Pakistan Army, the foreign office, and the provincial governments of the NWFP and Baluchistan, all opposed ISI and tried to sabotage its efforts to prosecute the war. Personality clashes, professional jealousies, and a lack of information on what was happening in Afghanistan, all combined to widen the gulf that existed between Akhtar and ISI, and the rest of our government. This additional burden never deterred him. Of course he had the great advantage of the trust of the president, without that he could not have survived. For almost eight years he remained in his critical post, being passed over for promotion several times because he was considered vital for the success of the Jihad. To Zia he was indispensable so long as the enemy remained unbeaten. Akhtar and Zia worked intimately together on matters of great national and international importance. The president developed a strong confidence in Akhtar based on his competence, integrity, and loyalty. In the end of course, Zia promoted and removed Akhtar from this critical job, but I will deal with this later.

The Jihad

HE UNDERSTOOD THE NEED FOR THE BOLD, AGGRESSIVE, USE OF WEAPONS, AND OF THE NEED TO ACHIEVE TACTICAL SURPRISE, TIME AND AGAIN THESE METHODS BROUGHT US SUCCESS ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

General Akhtar set himself extremely high standards, perhaps too high as he was seldom satisfied with his own performance. He was often apprehensive that he would be found wanting; that he would not live up to the standards he had set himself. He worked all hours to achieve his aim, for eight years he shouldered incredible responsibilities in the face of not only military opposition on the battlefield, but mounting political and personal opposition at home. In the end he achieved all his goals, except the last - to see an 'Islamic Republic of Afghanistan'.

His tremendous achievements were not recognized during his life, indeed part of the reason for his removal from ISI just as victory was in sight, was to ensure that he did not receive that recognition and fame. He was a great organiser, and as such put ISI on a modern footing, developing it into an efficient intelligence organisation that is now recognized as one of the leading such organisations in the world.

In 1980 Akhtar had started with virtually nothing, but by the time I joined ISI in 1983, it was not only supplying the war, but had instituted training for the Mujahideen, was sending advisory teams of ISI men into Afghanistan, and had devised a strategy to fight a rapidly expanding guerrilla war. ISI continued to grow, in fact during my four years its establishment was boosted twice. During 1984 the director of the CIA, William Casey, visited ISI, and personally congratulated Akhtar on the performance of the Mujahideen, together with the logistics and training system that he had set up. It was this visit of Mr. Casey, and his subsequent report back in the US, that directly led to the doubling of the American military budget for the Jihad in 1985. Akhtar had proved that not only were the

Mujahideen holding their own, but that victory in the field was, after all the scepticism, attainable.

Aside from Mr. Casey, who appreciated Akhtar's competence, he faced many problems with the Americans and the CIA. Perhaps understandably, the US felt that, if they were 'paying the piper', they should also, 'call the tune'. In other words the CIA, and senior US government officials, pressed Akhtar and myself to be allowed to decide who got the arms, how much they received, what targets the Mujahideen should attack, and demanded that American instructors train the Mujahideen. None of these things ever happened while Akhtar was Director-General. With some of the sophisticated weapon systems, such as the Stinger anti-aircraft missile (which we eventually received in late 1986), US trainers trained Pakistani Army instructors, but never Mujahideen.

There were two fundamental reasons why Akhtar never allowed Americans to become directly involved in the Jihad. Firstly, to do so would have meant giving truth to Soviet propaganda that the war was not a Jihad, but an extension of US foreign policy, with Afghan fighting Afghan on behalf of the two superpowers. To fight in a Jihad was our most powerful force for unity among the Mujahideen, if this could be undermined the shaky Alliance would collapse, and operations in the field would degenerate into infighting. If the US did more than supply the money and buy the arms, if they became involved inside Pakistan with the prosecution of the war, we put at risk unity, and without unity we could never win. Akhtar never lost sight to this, and was totally inflexible in rebuffing the continuous American urgings to be allowed to get involved.

The second reason for keeping Americans out was that the CIA, who were the ones who would have taken over training, logistics, and operational matters, were mostly incompetent in these fields. It was our experience that CIA operatives, with the exception of some of the middle level training staff who were ex-military, had no idea how to fight a guerrilla war. Their methods were clumsy, unrealistic, and often totally unprofessional. This was not really surprising as they were not military men, they had no relevant experience, and above all they did not understand the Afghans. In short, to have let them loose among the Mujahideen would have courted strategic (loss of unity) and tactical (no idea how to

conduct an Afghan Guerrilla war) disasters. Akhtar contributed immeasurably to the Jihad by keeping our American friends well away from the battlefield. I would stress that he was the only man able to do this. Even the president was under pressure to give the US a free hand, but it was Akhtar's strength of character that prevailed. Another matter that rankled the Americans in their dealings with Akhtar and ISI was that they became convinced that we favoured the Islamic fundamentalist parties and commanders in our allocation of arms. Certainly Akhtar sought to win the war in order to see an Islamic government replace the Communist one, but he knew that could never be achieved without a military victory in the field. To gain such a victory necessitated effective operations, sustained operations against key targets, and above all joint operations in which commanders cooperated irrespective of their political beliefs. Akhtar never lost sight of the basic fact that to put an Islamic government in Kabul meant a military victory first. As a professional soldier of great experience he translated this into giving weapons, ammunitions, and supplies to those parties or commanders who would perform successfully in the field.

There was another related matter on which Akhtar and the CIA did not see eye to eye, which also involved the distribution of arms. They advocated giving weapons direct to the commanders in the field, by passing the political parties at Peshawar. This was the method that Akhtar had been compelled to use at the start of the Jihad before the creation of the Alliance. It had resulted in confusion and corruption. Having set up the Alliance, having achieved a modicum of unity, Akhtar was adamant (and rightly so) that arms and supplies must be channelled through the parties, and that they must take on responsibility for internal allocation. The Americans' view was that combat effectiveness would be enhanced by giving the supplies direct to the men whom they wanted to use them. In the short term, or for a special operation, this could work but even then the arms should be given from the commander's party allocation. In the long term or done on a large scale, this method was badly flawed. How could control be maintained when giving supplies direct to hundreds of commanders? It was difficult enough distributing to seven parties; In practice this system invariably led to infighting, looting, corruption, and chaos

much the same situation as exists today when this system operates. Akhtar was absolutely right to resist it.

In practice some 70 percent of logistic support was given to the fundamentalist parties, but no single party got more than 20 percent. The US believed that this was done for political reasons. It was not. As the person responsible for several years for the detailed allocation of supplies to the parties I can vouch for the fact that it was done strictly on the basis of operational effectiveness. Although I had to implement this policy Akhtar kept a close eye on what was going on.

Akhtar could be disarmingly being well mannered and accommodating in discussions, while at the same time not breaking his principles. He was always sympathetic in his approaches to the Mujahideen concerning their problems. He spent countless hours in complex and emotional arguments with the Afghan leaders without offending them, without causing a breach in their relationships with each other, and at the same time without compromising his own position. This was a major asset of his which few could equal, as nobody is more sensitive to slight or insult than the Afghan.

Even the CIA found it hard to find fault with his dedication and professionalism. Few in the US or Pakistan knew of the close working relationship that developed between Akhtar and Casey, the two directors of their respective country's intelligence organizations. They worked together in harmony, and in an atmosphere of mutual trust. I never heard Casey contradict Akhtar during their discussions of the means of conducting the war. Once or twice at conferences, when Akhtar put forward the case for a particular weapon being needed, a member of Casey's staff would interject with arguments against it. Casey always overruled him, saying, 'He (Akhtar) is completely involved in this war and certainly knows better than anyone else about his requirements. We simply have to support him'. It was a great blow to the Jihad when Casey died.

I certainly found that, after I had satisfied him as to my own competence, Akhtar was not a difficult man to work for. Once he had gained confidence in his subordinates he seldom intervened in the routine day to day matters. He allowed me to get on with my job, and he judged my ability by the results achieved. He had his own views on how to conduct a

guerrilla war, but if a particular tactic or system failed to work on the battlefield it was always modified. He never made the mistake of reinforcing failure. He made up his mind by seeking advice, listening to arguments, and sometimes thinking aloud. He had the ability of sowing the seed of an idea in another person's mind, so that when it germinated it became as much their idea as his. He certainly never forced me to undertake any action that I did not believe in because he knew that if he did it would not be implemented with the conviction so necessary for success.

I was certainly grateful to Akhtar for the confidence he had in me, and the leeway he allowed me to get on with the job in hand. He had the ability, so often lacking in senior officers, of being able to delegate. He would normally hold a full scale operational conference every quarter to review military operations, and discuss and decide upon plans for the coming months. Once the strategy had been decided at the meeting he would not interfere with my conduct of either operations or logistics. He would, of course, observe and monitor progress. If things did not go according to his wishes he would ask the reasons, but he would never jump in and take direct control. At that stage, with an operation actually in progress he saw his role as being to support, advise, or assist. A difficult attitude for a person in his position, with ultimate responsibility for the war, to take. This good working relationship took about a year to establish fully as I was, at the start, very green and inexperienced in comparison with Akhtar who had been fighting the Jihad for four years by the time I joined ISI. As an example would cite the distribution of the SA-7 (surface to air missile). Initially I had to get his concurrence before issuing it to any party or commander. Later this was not necessary. Even with the critical Stingers Akhtar left me a free hand, provided that I got their deployment areas agreed at his operational conference.

At times he could show genuine emotion and sympathy for the suffering of others. In early 1986 I learned with deep concern that a large number of Shaheeds' families were living in miserable conditions in some of the refugee camps, with virtually no support of any kind. Even their parties which had a moral responsibility to assist them, appeared to have forgotten their plight. Their pathetic living conditions, and lack of concern with their welfare by the parties, was having a detrimental effect on the Jihad. Understandably, Mujahideen were becoming reluctant to come forward to fight when they saw how families of Shaheeds were neglected. This situation was exploited by Soviet and Afghan agents

(mostly women) in the camps, whose task was to undermine the resolve of families to support the war. They ridiculed the Mujahideen leadership for their seeming lack of interest in the conditions of the families, while at the same time spreading rumours about the corruption and dishonesty of the leaders. They emphasized allegations of how most of the leaders were living in luxurious villas in Peshawar or Islamabad, and were getting rich at the cost of the Jihad while the basic needs of the Shaheed's families were not met.

When I informed Akhtar of the seriousness of this situation he was deeply distressed. For the first time I saw tears in his eyes. He immediately summoned a meeting of the Alliance for the following day, at which he spoke at length, and with great feeling. Part of the problem was a lack of funds as if the parties donated, say \$20, to each family every month, there would be nothing left for the Jihad. Akhtar could see both sides of the problem and released additional funds from ISI reserves. Thereafter he never forgot them, and would frequently inquire of me the latest position, or discuss ways and means of assisting.

There was another matter that always concerned me with the prosecution of the Jihad, and one over which in my early days I had a number of lengthy arguments with General Akhtar. This involved the total lack of any publicity of the Mujahideen's efforts in the war. As a result details of their achievements, their successes, their sacrifices, never reached the public in Pakistan. Akhtar himself always shunned the limelight so I could understand his personal reluctance to meet the media, but surely the activities of the Mujahideen merited recognition by a wider audience than ISI. I urged the general to use the media to this effect. For months I kept bringing the matter up, pressing him to use all the means at our disposal to gain the attention, and hopefully support, of the Pakistani people for the Jihad, and indeed for the Afghan refugees. He appeared immovable. At last, after I had been particularly vocal he confided to me,

'The successes of the Afghan Jihad have resulted in professional jealousies against my person. As a result, I have created an army of enemies. Any further attempt to project the cause of the Afghan Jihad would be perceived as my own projection because I and Afghanistan are considered as one entity. This projection would draw violent reactions

against me and the Jihad and would hurt the cause. Also, President Zia will not tolerate it, considering it as my personal projection.'

Jamat-A-Islami was the only political party in Pakistan which actively supported the Afghan Jihad. Their leaders had developed close and intimate relations with the fundamentalists and Hekmatyar was their favourite. They regularly held public meetings in various parts of the country in order to muster public opinion in Pakistan in favour of the Jihad.

I am certain Akhtar fully understood the dangers of failing to counter the enemy's constant subversion and propaganda against the Jihad in Pakistan, but it seems he was powerless to refute it publicly. The Mujahideen and the refugees were blamed for all the violent crimes in the NWFP and Baluchistan; they were accused of gun running and attacking the local population; they were blamed for stealing the land and taking jobs and trade that belonged to Pakistanies; and they were alleged to be responsible for the influx of drugs being smuggled into the country. KHAD and RAW agents actively fomented discontent among both the refugees and the local people. Often they would plant bombs which killed many innocent victims, then blame the Afghans and the war. We knew that most of these charges were false, but we were unable to mount a campaign to counter them. For example, the weapons were smuggled in mainly by Pakistani tribal Maliks (chiefs) in Connivance with the Afghan Communist government, while all the drug factories were in Pakistan. The majority of the drug traffickers were Pakistanis, many making millions of dollars in this dirty game. Regrettably the true culprits were never exposed. With the president's indifference and with so many enemies outside of IST, Akhtar could do little in the field of public relations.

It was the same story with Soviet atrocities. For some reason I could never really fathom, international journalists ignored the terrible crimes perpetrated by Soviet, troops in Afghans. The systematic slaughter of women and children, the extensive use of torture, the bayonetting of children, and the rape of women in helicopter and then' the throwing of their victims out, are the type of outrage they committed. No effort was made to mobilise public opinion against the Soviet Union in the free world for these terrible acts. Village after village was razed to the ground. A deliberate Soviet tactic was to render millions

homeless, to destroy their homes and Crops, and to indiscriminately scatter millions of mines - yet the headlines of the worlds newspapers never mentioned what was going on. There was some inexplicable indifference which neither I or General Akhtar could understand or redress.

There was, however, one area of international relations in which General Akhtar had a highly beneficial influence. This was in securing massive financial support for the Jihad from Saudi Arabia. He was the key figure in convincing the Saudi government to back the war. For every US dollar that was supplied by the Americans to the CIA's arms buying fund, the Saudis equalled it. Hundreds of millions of dollars were given by Saudi Arabia, and her generous assistance is what keeps the Mujahideen in the field today when American aid has been so severely curtailed. Other rich Arab individuals from all over the Middle East have also contributed very substantial sums to particular parties. Prince Turkie, the then head of the Saudi intelligence service, was a frequent visitor to Islamabad, and his relations with Akhtar were excellent. Both believed fervently in the importance of an Islamic brotherhood which ignored territorial frontiers. It is significant to note that the Mujahideen have never forgotten their debt to Saudi Arabia.

Prince Turkie Al-Faisal was the official representative of the Saudi government on Afghan Jihad. He used to visit Pakistan secretly at least twice a year to discuss the Afghan situation with General Akhtar and the Afghan leaders. I always remembered him as a man who was exceptionally kind, gracious and thoughtful towards the Afghan cause. Although his character was formed by his aristocratic upbringing yet he was the most humble and modest Arab prince I ever met. His education and experience in the West made him completely free of the common Arab prejudices towards the non Arabs. Prince Turkie and General Akhtar had developed a special liking for each other as a result, Saudi government provided full support to the Afghan cause.

With China also, Akhtar was influential in prevailing upon that government to provide a large and expanding supply of arms and ammunition. Akhtar met all the senior, visiting foreign delegations, briefed them on the war and the problems to be overcome. Over the years he became to be held in high esteem for his professional competence and strength of

character. It seemed at times that he had taken over the role of our foreign ministry with regard to enlisting support for the Afghan Jihad. I should point out here that as Director-General of IST, Akhtar had a host of other national and international duties and commitments apart from the Afghan war. ISI is a vast and sensitive organization, whose head faced with multiple and complex problems often requiring quick and accurate responses. It is a place where mistakes are never forgiven, where a wrong decision can cause incalculable harm to the national interest. Two incidents will illustrate my point.

One of Akhtar's responsibilities was internal security, which involved, guarding the government and the president from subversion, sabotage, or rebellion. On the 6th July, 1980, a huge anti govt demonstration threatened to get out of control. The demonstrators had occupied the Civil Secretariat and forced the closure of the Central Government Offices, paralyzing the government machinery. The civil administration had failed to contain the situation, and senior government representatives who had tried to intervene had been rejected. At this stage General Akhtar volunteered to defuse the situation. A small team from ISI, working under his personal directions, was able to bring about an amicable settlement without recourse to violence. Later, Akhtar was able to prevent a coup attempt from developing against president Zia, by rounding up the suspects just prior to the attack, which was to be made during a military parade at which the president would take the salute. It is of interest to note that a similar plot to kill President Sadat of Egypt succeeded.

I would estimate that although General Akhtar was only able to devote half his time to the Afghan war, there was never a day that passed without his finding out what was happening. I found at times that it was difficult, with his tight schedule, to meet him for discussions: But if he could not see me he would always talk on the telephone to find out what it was I needed to speak about, and its urgency. If I did not ask for a m for a few days he would call me to check what was happening, and ask why I had not contacted him. At night was the normal time for him to speak with me to see if there was anything he needed to do for the Jihad, or to talk over the military or logistic situation. Whenever I was not available on the telephone he would get most upset. This routine was followed whenever I was, in Islamabad, Quetta, Peshawar, or elsewhere, throughout my three-and-a-half years with him.

The Victory

AKHTAR HAD PROVED THAT NOT ONLY WERE THE MUJAHIDEEN HOLDING THEIR OWN, BUT THAT VICTORY IN THE FIELD WAS, AFTER ALL THE SCEPTICISM, ATTAINABLE.

General Akhtar was a great believer in the use of the tactical offensive in the conduct of a guerrilla war. In this he was undoubtedly correct, as no war can ever be won by purely defensive methods. He understood the need for the bold, aggressive, use of weapons, and of the need to achieve tactical surprise. Time and again these methods brought us success on the battlefield. It was Akhtar who devised the Mujahideen's offensive use of the multi or single barrelled rocket launchers. With these weapons no worthwhile target inside Afghanistan was secure from attack. Except during the winter months the night sky above Kabul was criss-crossed by scores of rockets descending on the city from different directions. These tactics had the effect of creating a deep sense of insecurity in the minds of the Soviets and Afghans. They reacted by deploying more and more troops in static guard duties, thus reducing their ability to mount offensive operations. For them to adopt a purely defensive strategy would be to acknowledge defeat.

Akhtar's insistence on the offensive use of anti-aircraft weapons, particularly from late 1986 onwards with the Stinger Missile, was another key factor in the war gradually tilting in favour of the Mujahideen. His tactic of deploying these weapons around airfields in an ambush role, with highly mobile teams of firers, proved a huge success. In fact it was the introduction of the Stinger, coupled with its offensive use, that was I believe, crucial in convincing the Soviet authorities that they could never win the war. Our technique of deliberately exposing a tempting target to induce aircraft to attack, or retaliate, was one successful method used.

By early 1987 it was clear to us that the Soviets would not last much longer in Afghanistan. General Akhtar and I started serious discussions on what should be our operational strategy during, and particularly after, they had withdrawn. Of one thing Akhtar was certain, and

events proved him correct, and this was as soon as the Soviets started to pull out the US would begin to cut back on the supply of arms to the Mujahideen. He was convinced that the Americans would reduce their support to ensure there was no outright Mujahideen military victory.

There comes a time in any guerrilla war when their commander has to assess whether the moment has arrived to go over to conventional offensive warfare - to meet the enemy in the open on equal terms, and achieve a conventional military victory. It is the final phase of a guerrilla struggle. The timing has to be exactly right otherwise, if the guerrillas are defeated in a set-piece battle, their cause may be set back for months, even years. Examples of taking this decision too soon are General Giap in the early fifties against the French in Indo-China, and the North Vietnamese Tet offensive in Vietnam, in 1968. Although the guerrillas eventually triumphed in both cases, their premature conventional offensives were costly defeats. General Akhtar's judgement was that when, or if, the Soviets quit Afghanistan the Mujahideen should not try to defeat the remaining Afghan Communists by conventional means. He did not believe that they would ever be ready for this type of warfare, indeed he was certain that victory could be won without recourse to it.

In accordance with his wishes we agreed a continuance of the policy of death by a thousand cuts, but with increased emphasis on strangling Kabul. There should be no distractions from this primary goal, all other operations being judged on their effect on achieving collapse in the capital. The city was to be surrounded and attacked by rockets from all directions. Kabul airport was to be rendered unusable by continuous attacks from the Koh-i-Safi base to the north-east. A series of blocking positions were to be established across the main line of communication, the Salang Highway, between the city and the Soviet border. Their objective was to halt, or critically disrupt, the flow of logistic support that would surely continue from the Soviet Union after their troops had left. These ambushes were to be concentrated in the area of the Salang Tunnel, where the highway crosses the watershed of the Hindu Kush. This was Kabul's choke point. If the enemy sallied out from Kabul or elsewhere to open up their supply lines, so much the better as they would present further ambush opportunities. All other operations in Afghanistan would be secondary, and designed to contain and fix, not assault and capture, the remaining main Afghan garrisons.

Akhtar believed, and I strongly concurred, that such a strategy would defeat Najibullah's regime within a few months.

As it turned out, our discussions and planning were prematurely cut short as in March, 1987, the Jihad lost General Akhtar. After all those long years, after seeing the Mujahideen developed from a ragtag, ill-trained and ill-equipped force, to a vast guerrillas army that had brought the Soviet bear to its knees. Akhtar was deprived, by promotion, of witnessing victory.

The Debacle

HIS GREAT AMBITION WHICH TRAGICALLY HE WAS UNABLE TO FULFIL, WAS THAT AFTER THE SOVIET DEFEAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO VISIT KABUL AND OFFER PRAYERS TO ALLAH FOR FREEING THE CITY FROM HIS ENEMIES.

It can, regrettably, be said with more than a touch of trust, that the Mujahideen 'snatched defeat from the jaws of victory'. I believe that the process started with the promotion of General Akhtar to four star rank by President Zia, and his consequential appointment as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee. In March, 1987, the tide of war in Afghanistan was moving slowly but perceptively towards a guerrilla victory. The Soviets had realised they could not win on the battlefield. Gorbachev was considering how to make a military retreat into a political victory in Moscow, and to an international audience. A withdrawal of the Red Army was firmly, if covertly, in the Kremlin's agenda. At the moment, the man who was largely responsible for the Soviet humiliation, who during eight years had been overtaken in rank by his peers as he struggled to wage a guerrilla war on a massive scale against a superpower, was removed from ISI by promotion.

It came as a shock to Akhtar himself. For a week or so he declined to formally hand over his duties to his successor, Major General Hamid Gul, in the forlorn hope that he might be able to retain control over the Jihad in his new appointment. It was not to be.

It is my conviction that Akhtar was primarily removed by Zia to appease the US. Certainly, to promote him out of ISI at that time would bring personal advantages to the president - the credit for a likely forthcoming victory for example - but American pressure was surely the key factor. As I have explained earlier it was always Akhtar that frustrated American efforts to take over the training of the Mujahideen, or to have a say in the allocation of arms, or to by-pass the political parties in their distribution. To many in the US Akhtar was seen as having outlived his usefulness by early 1987. They acknowledged that he was the architect of victory in the field, but once that looked like becoming a reality he could, indeed should, be dispensed with.

The Americans saw Akhtar as an inflexible supporter of an Islamic fundamentalist government in Kabul. They believed, erroneously, that he had for years favoured the fundamentalist with US purchased supplies on religious grounds. They knew he was dedicated to a simple military victory, brought about by the collapse of the Communists in Kabul. The Americans on the other hand wanted the Soviets out, but not the fundamentalists in. They had a horror of another Islamic state similar to Iran. Their views coincided with those of the Soviets, who were frightened of an Islamic government stirring up the nationalistic and religious ambitions of their bordering republics. Both warring superpowers therefore wanted much the same in Afghanistan - a stalemate. A first step in this direction by the US was to get Akhtar out of ISI, and away from the Jihad. Their pressure to this end coincided with Zia's ambitions to reap the glory of winning the war, and to placate Akhtar's military and political detractors, of whom there were many, including the then prime minister.

Although many regarded Zia as a ardent fundamentalist, this was not his many driving forces. Devout Muslim, yes, but too much a politician to have the fundamentalist's fervour. Of course, without Zia there could have been no successful Jihad, but behind all the public image there was always the calculating politician who put his own position foremost when considering his actions. If he felt any Mujahideen party leader was 'rocking his boat' he stepped in straight away. The most ardent fundamentalist leader was Gul Badin, who became the 'bete noir' of the Americans when he refused to meet President Reagan while visiting the UN. This snub did not please Zia. On two occasions, in my presence, he directed Akhtar to rebuke Gul Badin with the words, 'Gul Badin must be clearly warned that it was Pakistan who made him an Afghan leader, and it is Pakistan who can equally destroy him if he continues to misbehave'. Akhtar passed on the message politely, but with little noticeable effect. Once Gul Badin had made up his mind nobody on earth could get him to change it. I think he had a double ration of Afghan stubbornness.

The next blow to the Jihad occurred in April, 1988, when 10,000 tons of arms and ammunition stored at Ojhri Camp in Rawalpindi, went up with one gigantic bang. The city witnessed the most lethal, devastating, and spectacular, firework display ever likely to occur

in Pakistan. Gone were all the Mujahideen's reserve war stocks, and with it their ability to prosecute the war effectively during the Soviet's forthcoming withdrawal. Accusations and recriminations flew as thick and fast as the rockets raining down on Rawalpindi. Why was so much ammunition stored at that moment in a densely populated area (100 people lost their lives and over 1000 were injured)? Who was responsible?

Ojhri ammunition dump was of cardinal importance to the pipeline that supplied the Mujahideen with arms and ammunition. It was selected because of its central location, and was essential for the success of the entire Afghan operation. The stocks were never allowed to buildup at this camp.

President and the prime minister were fully aware of this camp and both had visited it. They had never objected to the selection of this site for temporary storage purposes. For eight years, the camp functioned in absolute secrecy and enabled the success of the largest covert arms pipeline in the post world war -2 era.

It had been over a year since General Akhtar had left ISI and had nothing to do with the huge quantities of ammunition in the camp at the time of explosion. Unfortunately the prime minister turned on Akhtar. The fact that both the president and prime minister had long known the camp's location, had visited it, and had made no complaint as to its whereabouts, were conveniently forgotten. President Zia felt obliged to support his Directors General (both Akhtar and Gul) so the subsequent Court of Inquiry apportioned no blame to individuals. In fact it was the prime minister who lost his job shortly afterwards, rather than any generals.

On the 17 August, 1988, President Zia, General Akhtar, US Ambassador Raphel, US military attache, Brigadier Wassom, eight other Pakistan Generals, their staff, and the crew, in all 31 people, were killed in an air crash. The plane was the president's aircraft, and the cause of the crash was reliably established as sabotage. At a stroke the military government of Pakistan was virtually wiped out.

All these VIPs had been gathered at the small town of Bahawalpur to watch a demonstration of an American M-1 battle tank, which the Pakistan Army was considering buying. Disquietingly, neither President Zia nor General Akhtar should have been aboard the plane. Both had been persuaded against their better judgement to attend the demonstration. It was not a function that required their presence. Such a low lever event would normally have been handled by the Chief of General Staff; the presence of the president was unnecessary. Similarly with Akhtar, who in his new post had little interest in such a demonstration.

After the crash the official inquiry revealed sabotage as the only possible cause, with the probability that some sort of quick acting nerve gas had been released in the cockpit which simultaneously, and instantaneously, disabled all the crew. The culprits were never revealed as neither Pakistan nor America wished them to be exposed. The US went so far as to instigate a deliberate cover-up despite the fact that their ambassador and military attache had been murdered. The cover up took the form of forbidding the FBI investigation team that was pressing to go to Islamabad, from doing so. Only quite recently the US had passed the 'Long Arm Law', which empowers the FBI to investigate any terrorist attack overseas involving US citizens. On this occasion it was not until months later, when the trail was cold, that the FBI were allowed to send out a team of three. Even then they were seemingly under order not to lift too many stones. Their investigations were conspicuously cosmetic.

The truth was the US was not sorry to see either Zia or Akhtar gone. The State Department had no wish to unearth a can of worms that might implicate the KGB or KHAD in this type of terrorist assassination. It would ruin their policy of detente with the Soviet Union, jeopardise the Soviet troops withdrawal and, as senior US citizens had died, public clamour for retribution might be impossible to ignore. From the US viewpoint the crash's only drawback was that two Americans had been sacrificed - but this was accidental as Zia had only asked them to join him for the return flight at the last moment.

Thus it was that General Akhtar became a Shaheed almost 18 months after leaving ISI. After his death the final body blows to the Jihad were administered by the US and Pakistan. The Americans continued to cut back on arms supplies so that the Soviets would have a smooth withdrawal, and so that they could ensure a stalemate in Afghanistan, while the Pakistanis and ISI fatally switched from a guerrilla to a conventional strategy and attempted to take Jalabad. On top of Akhtar's removal, the loss of ammunition stock at Ojhri, the murder of Zia and Akhtar, these final events crippled the Jihad that Akhtar and the Mujahideen had so nearly won.

Akhtar's funeral was a fitting one for a soldier of his rank and achievements. It was attended by the president of Pakistan, the chiefs of all three services, members of the Senate and National Assembly, together with large detachments of soldiers, sailors and airmen. They, along with sorrowing representatives of his comrades-in-arms, the Mujahideen came to give their final salute to the Silent Soldier. Probably it will be the Mujahideen who remember General Akhtar with more admiration and affection than his own countrymen.

